

**PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE
OF INTERNATIONAL PALESTINIAN STUDENT STUDYING
AT UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA**



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For Getting Bachelor Degree of Education
in English Department**

**Proposed by:
CHOIRIL BERLIAN OKTAVIANA
A320130186**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA**

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APPROVAL

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PUBLICATION ARTICLE

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Approved to be Examined by Consultant

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Fitri Kurniawan', with a stylized, looped design.

Fitri Kurniawan M.Ed.Res.

NIK. 1202

ACCEPTANCE

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Accepted and Approved by Board of Examiner

School of Teacher Training and Education

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

On March 22th, 2017

Team of Examiner:

1. Fitri Kurniawan M.Ed.Res.

(Chair Person)

2. Aryati Prasetyarini M.Pd.

(Member I)

3. Siti Fatimah M.Hum.

(Member II)

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()
()

Dean,



Prof. Dr. Haran Joko Pravitno, M. Hum.

NIP. 19650428199303001

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Surakarta, February 15th, 2017

The researcher,



Choiril Berlian O

A320130186

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Abstract

This study is aimed to explore the academic experience of international Palestinian student studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta and the efforts done by the participant in facing the academic problems. In achieving the objectives, the researcher used hermeneutic phenomenological study as an approach to collect and analyze the data. The technique for collecting data is repeated semi-structured in depth-interview as data collection. The result of the analysis shows that the participant perceives two aspects of academic experience covered physical and non-physical aspects. The physical aspects included the facility covered the boarding house issue, the availability of descent laboratory tools, insufficient English book collection in library. The non-physical aspect more stressful on the teaching activity, culture, attitude of Indonesian people and accommodation. There are three active efforts done by the participant in facing the academic problems, begins from learning Bahasa Indonesia, keep coming to go to campus and borrow Indonesian friend's motorcycle to go to places far from campus. However, there is a limited capacity of the participant to do beyond the situation related to the facilities and boarding house provided by university.

Keywords: hermeneutic phenomenology, academic experience, international Palestinian student, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman akademis mahasiswa internasional Palestina yang belajar di Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta dan upaya yang dilakukan oleh partisipan dalam menghadapi permasalahan akademis yang ada. Dalam mencapai tujuan penelitian, peneliti menggunakan fenomenologi hermeneutik sebagai pendekatan untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data. Teknik semi-struktur wawancara secara mendalam digunakan sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa partisipan mempersepsikan dua aspek pengalaman akademisnya yang meliputi aspek fisik dan non-fisik. Aspek fisik meliputi fasilitas, yang mencakup persoalan asrama untuk mahasiswa internasional, ketersediaan alat-alat laboratorium, dan minimnya koleksi buku dalam bahasa Inggris di perpustakaan. Aspek non-fisik lebih menekankan pada aktivitas belajar mengajar, budaya, sikap masyarakat Indonesia dan akomodasi. Terdapat tiga upaya aktif yang dilakukan oleh partisipan dalam menghadapi permasalahan akademis, mulai dari mempelajari Bahasa Indonesia, tetap datang ke kampus dan meminjam motor dari teman Indonesia jika akan pergi ke tempat yang jauh dari area kampus. Namun, terdapat keterbatasan kapasitas partisipan terhadap beberapa permasalahan akademis terkait dengan fasilitas dan asrama yang disediakan oleh pihak universitas.

Kata kunci: fenomenologi hermeneutik, pengalaman akademis, mahasiswa internasional Palestina, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

1. INTRODUCTION

English is not something new to learn these days, for almost every country in the world is speaking English as their first language. Jaekeun (2014) stated that English is the most common language spoken by many countries in all around the world. As worldwide language and a tool to communicate in the global era, the importance of English cannot be denied and ignored (Sozdinler, 2008). Consequently, it is needed in almost every aspects of life and plays a major role in countless sectors including medicine, engineering and education.

Since it becomes the international language, hence, most developed countries tend to have certain institution which served English as their product of learning. Indonesia is one of non-native countries which provide countless learning programs for pupils in certain education institutions for a long time. These programs can be easily found and been implemented by many schools and universities in Indonesia such as International student program and student exchange. According to Indonesia Ministry of Education (2010), Indonesia has established various forms of international cooperation with 162 countries on five continents recently. Indonesia has abroad institution partners to carry out these programs. The programs are good to expand the education system in Indonesia and build up a high-quality relationship with other country in all regions of the world.

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) is one of universities which has implemented international program for relatively long time. Solopos (2012) reported that Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta has an agreement with other countries such as Jordan, Korea, Sudan, Palestine, Thailand and Madagascar as the partners in their international program. Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta has international class for ten majors, they are: Math Education, Biology Education, Accounting, Communications Science, Informatics, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Nursing and Islamic Education in Arabic (<http://web.ums.ac.id>).

While international students are coming in a relatively large number, very little is known about their nature of experience studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Therefore, it is interesting to know how is international student life's in the university take place. Since international students are coming from different country,

they bring different custom, value and culture with them. Hence, investigating their academic experience during their study in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta will be worth to conduct. Having had numerous differences, obviously they need more time to adjust Indonesia's culture, custom even the value. For this reason, their academic experience will be critical aspects to investigate since there was not been any research of this issue in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The current study will use student's personal perspectives as the object of this study.

Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, 'bracketing' taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving (Van Manen, 1990). Traditionally, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. The motivation behind the phenomenological approach is to light up the particular and identify phenomena through how they are seen by the practitioner in a circumstance (Stan Lester, 1999).

In this study, the researcher is interested in investigating academic experience of international Palestinian student studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. This research use phenomenological approach. Hence, it will investigate and analyze academic experience of international Palestinian students in fifth semester based on their experience and perspective.

To manage where the current study among literatures, the writer discussed some previous study on investigation the academic experience of international students: The first is Qing Gu et.al (2009) which aimed to describe an investigation of the experiences of first-year international students during their undergraduate study at four UK higher education institutions. He found that personal, pedagogical and psychological factors are as important as organizational and social cultures in influencing students' adaptation, identity change and ultimate success.

The second study was conducted by Nikola Telbis et.al (2014) which aimed to investigate international students' confidence and academic success. The study shows that foreign students are encountering difficulties in social adaptability, language barriers, academic ability, and financial need. Data shows that international students who scored high on confidence levels in completing their programs of study also scored high on their confidence of their resources.

The third study focusing on the academic experience of international students on scholarships in Malaysian Universities constructed by Adekalu Samuel Olutokunbo, et.al (2013). The study revealed that, the scholars are generally satisfied and able to cope with the classroom teaching as well as academic huddles at Linton University College (LUC) while adapting to host challenges.

The fourth study was constructed by Xiaojiong Ding (2016). It aims to know and explore the experience of international students in China. It is found that international students' has low levels of satisfaction with their study and living experiences show that China has not paid sufficient attention to improving its supply of higher education towards international student market.

The other research was conducted by Narayan T. Ramachandran (2016) which tried to examine the academic and other social problems that international students who pursue programs offered by the universities in the UK encounter. The study shows that international students have a smooth academic progression and a comfortable social life. They are satisfied with the educational program and system for international students.

The sixth, Jenny Lee, et.al (2016) constructed a study that aimed to compare the experiences of international students from within and outside the Asian region and then examines Chinese international students' perceptions of discrimination. Utilizing the concept of neo-nationalism, survey findings revealed that Asian students reported greater difficulties and unfair treatment compared with students coming from Europe, North America, and other regions.

The last is a study constructed by Liv Thorstensson (2016) that looked at the academic experiences of 6 Asian international students at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management (CSOM). The findings indicated culture shock, language barriers, and education shock as variables affecting the adjustment of these students, and are congruent with previous studies in this area.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research is qualitative research. The subject of the research is a male undergraduate international Palestinian student studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The object of this study is academic experience of international Palestinian student in the fifth semester studying at UMS. The audio taped file of the participant's

interview were transcribed and entered into a Word document then used as source of data in this research. Based on the sources of the data, the instrument of data collection are in the form of interview. The researcher used were semi-structured interview design. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method by the researcher to analyze the data.

The audio taped files of the interviews were transcribed and entered into a Word document. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy repeatedly. It was done by simultaneously reading all the transcripts while listening to the audio files. The process is iterative (reading the transcription repeatedly and get a sense of the overall text). These are presented on stories structured around the key themes. After obtained the sense of the overall text from interview transcript, the data reduction was done. The data reduction was done by removing extraneous information (not relevant to the phenomena under investigation) from the participants' story. Having done the data reduction, then the researcher immersed in the data to start early interpretation and to locate themes to the key experiences and meaning related to the research focus. After that the researcher starts isolating the natural meaning units (NMUs). The transcripts were in the word documents form and the data are separated by listing it in numbering. The researcher uses member checking to get the credibility of data by returning to the participants to discuss about the tentative themes emerged to check the participants' perspective or even alternatives themes.

3. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

3.1.1 Explicative Theme

The participant confirmed that the proposed explicative themes delineated their experiences, there are: *complaint, expectation, compliment and suggestion*.

3.1.1.1 Complaint

'Complaint' was a predominant feature of the participant's academic experience studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Complaint here is included complaint towards boarding house, teaching activity, facility and accommodation. The following extracts help to elicit these themes.

1.) Complaint towards boarding house

“It is like...we can say like hell but... ya it is like a jail really because they have a lot a lot of rules. In my country we have rules. All around the world there is rules and everyone has their own rules but not like the rules in here. So for example every salat we must to go to masjid to make it but sometimes we busy to do it or in some other time we cannot make our salat in the room. Some other problem that they played the speaker with very loud voice every time wherever they want however they want, so for example I want to study and for example in exam time. Sometimes they play the Quran, yes Alquran is good and make us comfort but not in loud voice.....we not comfortable”.

2.) Complaint towards teaching activity

“...but other lecturer sometimes I cannot understand what they want or what they are talking about”.

3.) Complaint towards facility

“Mmm, it is not very well, it is not very much because the labs for international teaching and even regular teaching it have to be more than this because for my study I have to keep practicing everything I took in this university, everything I have to practice in the lab and the lab is not really comfortable”.

4.) Complaint towards accomodation

“For sure, of course. It is totally big problem because ehemmm many of International students when they are coming to Indonesia, they cannot ride motorcycle because maybe in their country they don't have motorcycle and as well there is no side walk so we have to walking in the middle of the street..”

3.1.1.2 Expectation

The theme ‘expectation’ refers to things in campus that wish to be realized. The participant has many expectations toward facilities and teaching activities before they come to the university. Unfortunately some aspects are not matching to their expectation and it tends to lead disappointment in their selves as international student in this university. The theme is elaborated using following extracts from the participant.

“But for electrical engineering actually not as I expect...expected when I came from Palestine because I thought we can have better labs, better education, better teaching.....because the labs for international teaching and even regular teaching it have to be more than this...If I cannot speak Bahasa Indonesia very well then I cannot understand what happens in the classroom”.

3.1.1.3 Compliment

The theme ‘compliment’ is identified as the third explicative theme emerging from the recorded interview. The participant frequently gives compliment towards some lecturer, Indonesian’s friend, Indonesian culture, and the facilities such as classroom and toilet. The following extracts help to elicit this theme.

“well... they nice and they act very nice, very well. We comfort to being friend with them. They are friendly. Most of Indonesian people, they are friendly. It is easy to do anything with them. Most of Indonesian people, they have it, they are friendly”.

3.1.1.4 Suggestion

The theme ‘suggestion’ is identified as the fourth explicative theme emerging from the participant’s disappointment towards the teaching activity and boarding house provided by Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta that has been recorded in interview session. The following extracts help to elicit this theme.

“Well my suggestion is that they try as much as they..as they can to make different in all pesma, in all rules, in everything every single thing they face. So for example, they have to put internet in

pesma, for example they...to change kind of this rules to not be really straight with the students there...”

3.1.2 Academic Problem

The researcher found that the participant did many efforts in responding the academic problem when studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. There is an active effort done by the participant to deal with the academic problem especially for teaching activity. From the data interview, it found that the participant did self- learning such as looking the materials in the internet if the lecturer could not delivered it well; it could be the way of teaching which used Bahasa Indonesia or their insufficient speaking ability. Nevertheless, the participant has limited capacity to do beyond the exist situation. From the interview data, it found that some of the participant's expectations are not accomodated well when studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta.

3.2 Discussion

The researcher found that international student; in this study Palestinian is chosen as the subject of the study perceives his academic experience as challenges in many different way. The interpretation covered physical and non-physical aspects. The physical aspects are the buildings built up in UMS to accommodate international student necessity such as the laboratory and the boarding house, meanwhile the non-physical aspect more stressed on the teaching activity. The other interpretation also covered the culture, some of lecturer and attitude of Indonesian people. From the interview data, it found that some of the participant's expectations are not accommodated well when studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The participant also gives suggestion for the policy maker to improve the services' towards international student at UMS.

1.) Paticipant interpretation

The researcher found that the participant as an International student studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, tend to experience challenges; ranging from facility. It covers the boarding house issue like unaccomodating regulation in boarding house and rest room hygiene, the need for larger room for student as well, the availability of descent laboratorium tools, insufficient English book

collection in library. The other challenge is teaching activity. It covers the lecturer's English speaking ability in teaching and the way of teaching itself. The other challenge faced by participant is accommodation problem.

2.) The respond towards academic problem faced by participant

Related to the academic problems faced by the participant when studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta included the boarding house, teaching activity, facility and accommodation, it suggest that the participant did active efforts to face it. For the teaching activity for instance, the participant need to looking for many materials and tutorials by himself in the internet to get understanding of the materials being explained in the classroom. The participant also begins to learn Bahasa Indonesia in facing communication problems with the lecturers in the classroom. For the accommodation problem, the participant is walking in the first year studying in UMS or borrows Indonesian friend's motorcycle to go to a place far from the campus area. Nevertheless, there is a limited capacity of the participant to do beyond the situation related to the facilities and boarding house.

4. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

From the previous analysis, the researcher draws the following conclusion:

- a. The participant as an international student perceives academic experience challenges covered physical and non-physical aspects when studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The physical aspects included the facility covered the boarding house issue like unaccommodating regulation in boarding house and rest room's hygiene, the need for larger room for student as well, the availability of descent laboratory tools, insufficient English book collection in library. The non-physical aspect more stressed on the teaching activity, culture and attitude of Indonesian people. It includes the lecturer's English speaking ability in teaching, teaching learning activity in classroom, some of good Indonesia culture and Indonesian people attitude that is known as friendly and helpful. The other challenge faced by participant is an accommodation problem. The researcher concludes that the participant has a number of expectation and suggestion for Universitas

Muhammadiyah Surakarta's policy maker from the interview recorded, namely adding internet daily or wifi, re-evaluating the rules, building a small bathroom inside the room in the international boarding house. Besides that, there is an expectation for some lecturers who cannot speak English well are replaced, in order to manage a better teaching activity.

- b. Related to the academic problems namely boarding house, teaching activity and facilities faced by the participant during studying at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, there are some active labors done by the participant in facing these problems. For the teaching activities' problem, the participant begins to learn Bahasa Indonesia to cope with the communication problem towards the materials being explained by the lecturer that cannot speak English well and using Bahasa Indonesia as major language in teaching activity. In facing the accommodation problem the participant is keep walking to go to campus and borrow Indonesian friend's motorcycle to go to places far from campus. However, there is a limited capacity of the participant to do beyond the situation related to the facilities and boarding house provided by Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta.

4.2 Implication

Based on the results of the research, my findings have implications toward international boarding house's administrator, international office's management, lecturers in international class and policy makers.

- a. For international boarding house's administrator

Re-evaluating the decisions related to the international boarding house's managements at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta included the rules, room and the bathroom, improving the boarding house services' quality such as providing internet daily or wifi in the boarding house.

- b. For international office's management

International office should pay attention on selecting the lecturers' for international student.

- c. For lecturer in international class

Mastering or improving English skill as well as the language used in teaching activity, minimizing the use of Bahasa Indonesia in teaching international students.

d. For the policy maker

Improving the services' quality towards international students both in physical and non-physical aspects.

4.3 Suggestion

After finishing this research, the researcher hopes it can be useful for all. The researcher gives some suggestion as follows:

1. The policy makers even the lecturers should improve the quality of teaching itself, it can be done through enhancing their English skill or joining the English course held by the university seriously in order to give the best services in teaching learning activity especially for international class.
2. For the policy maker, hopefully this research can be used as the tool to re-evaluate the decision related to the international boarding house's management. The boarding house's administrator could add some supporting facility to support the international students' necessity such as Wifi and make a small bathroom inside the room.
3. The facilities provided by Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta should be improved while some facilities are not fulfilled the international student's requirement. Hopefully, the policy maker can fix even complete things needed in laboratory to create better atmosphere and increase the quality of teaching learning activity. Since the books in library mostly in Bahasa Indonesia, therefore more English books should be added to support their needs as international students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta.

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